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September 14, 2017

Poison Pen: Rita Skeeter, her Quick-Quotes Quill & Journalism Ethics in the Wizarding World

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Knight-Davis: Good evening, everybody, and thank you all for coming out tonight. We'll get rolling here in just a second, but before we do, since we've got a good group here already, I wanted to do the standard theater warning and please silence any alarms, beeps, ringers, tones or other distracting beeps that may come on throughout the course of the presentation for the benefit of the rest of the audience members.

I think we're right on the dot now. My name is Stacey Knight-Davis. I'm one of the librarians here at Booth Library. I'm also one of the co-ringleaders of the Harry Potter exhibit. Beth Heldebrandt back there running the camera is also part of the team that's helping to put this together.

It is our great pleasure tonight to introduce Lola Burnham, who combines in one person, a journalism scholar a comm law expert and a rabid Harry Potter fan, which is very exciting for us because she is the perfect person to do "Poison Pen: Rita Skeeter, Her Quick Quotes Quill (say that three times fast) and Journalism Ethics in the Wizarding World." So I'm going to go ahead and turn it over to Lola and we can enjoy this interesting lecture on journalism ethics.

Speaker Lola Burnham: Well, I hope I'm more interesting than Professor Binns, anyway. I want to ask first off, how many of you have read the books, hands up - some of them? That's good. I just want to know how much I have to explain who people are when I'm going through here. If everybody knows them I don't want to have to keep, "Oh, that's Hogwarts headmaster Albus Dumbledore" – OK

You may not know it but the news media play an important role in Harry Potter almost from page one of the first book. We get our first reference on page six in Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone for us and of course the Philosopher's Stone published 20 years ago this year in Britain.

"Mrs. Dursley came into the living room carrying two cups of tea. It was no good. He'd have to say something to her. He cleared his throat nervously. 'Er, Petunia, dear, you haven't heard from your - oops typo - your sister lately, have you?'"

As he had expected Mrs. Dursley looked shocked and angry. After all, they normally pretended she didn't have a sister. 'No, she said sharply, 'Why?'"

'Funny stuff on the news,' Mr. Dursley mumbled. 'Owls, shooting stars, and there were a lot of funny-looking people in town today.'"

So in the page previous, the weatherman had been talking about showers of owls and that people were reporting shooting stars and that he was reminding people that Boxing Day wasn't until the following week so what are you doing...Bonfire Day, sorry. So, these occurrences, of course, are very newsworthy to muggles because they don't know what the heck is happening. To the people in the Wizarding World, of course, they know that all of these things are being... the Owls are flying all over the country and their people are celebrating and shooting off stars because Voldemort has been, as they thought at the time, killed, or at least sent away somewhere. Dumbledore, of course, would tell them differently if they had bothered to ask him.

Throughout the first three books the news media - muggle and wizarding alike – are taken pretty much at their word, so whatever they report we believe it. We believe what the muggles are reporting. We believe what we hear in the wizarding news. That starts to change over the course of the books beginning especially with the fourth book, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, where the wizarding media are increasingly mistrusted and people begin to doubt what they have to say, especially people in the know. And people that we know as readers to be on the side of good, the side of right, really have reason to question what the wizarding media are reporting because they know that the real story is not getting out.

To read the Harry Potter books is to watch the wizarding news media become the very worst one can imagine, as they abandon ethical principles, fail to report the news accurately, acquiesce to government pressure to hush things up and finally succumb to a takeover by force the evil element of wizarding society. Author JK Rowling began to encounter issues with Britain's notoriously rabid tabloid journalists only a little over a year after publication of Sorcerer's Stone - Philosopher's Stone, sorry, I'm an American so I'll be calling it Sorcerer's Stone.

She tells the story of when her daughter was five years old and her daughter was born in 1993, which means that in 1998 this story took place. In this slide she's ... she was one of about 650 people to give testimony over the course of several months before the Leveson inquiry into a phone hacking scandal that started in the UK when a missing girl's cell phone was hacked, making her parents believe she was still alive. This girl had been kidnapped and ultimately killed, but journalists hacked into her cell phone voicemail, and her parents thought she had been checking her voicemail, and so her parents had hoped for a few more days that she was alive and it turned out, indeed, that journalists had been messing with things that they're not supposed to mess with. Even in Britain there are laws that we're not supposed to, you know, illegally hack into somebody's cell phone. So this and other things led to what became known as the News of the World phone hacking scandal; here in America we just pretty much called it the British phone hacking scandal, and it led to all sorts of people - people who had had dealings with the press because they've been victims of crimes, celebrities who had been hounded by paparazzi, by people setting up outside their homes, including JK Rowling.

So again, about 650 people testified. Her testimony ran some 33 pages long - the transcript for that day, and then she filed an amendatory statement after that with another 7 pages, so that was quite a bit of talking she had to do about the way she had been treated by the press. Now in her testimony she admitted that part of the reason her series was so successful was because she had had really favorable coverage in the early days. A lot of media coverage really stirred awareness of what she was writing and helped to turn her books into the international phenomenon that we all know they are today. And she also acknowledged that many of the first journalists who dealt with her when she was just a total noob as an author were able to help her and helped coach her. One guy even turned the tape recorder off and gave her some advice on how to answer questions, and she really appreciated that and she she did not ever forget that.

However, she ends up before the Leveson inquiry and testifying and here is what she has to say about her children, her first daughter. "She's in her first year at primary school and I found her school bag in the evening and among the usual that is from school and debris that every child

generates I found an envelope addressed to me and a journalist. Now it's my recollection - the letter was from a journalist - so it's my recollection that the letter said that he intended to ask my mother at the school to put this in my daughter's bag or I don't I know... I don't know how, whether that's how the letter got in my daughter's bag or not. I can only say that the sense... I felt such a sense of invasion that my daughter's bag - I mean it's very difficult to say how angry and how how angry I felt that my five-year-old daughter's school was this was no longer a place of, you know, complete security from journalists."

So we'll talk more about how we're supposed to treat children in the editors code of practice in Britain - but, for now, she said, "On a number of occasions I have felt that I have had no choice but to take action against members of the press both through the Press Complaints Commission and through the law" - and we'll talk about the Press Complaints Commission. This was run by the newspaper industry and regularly handed down light punishments. Now you have to remember, Britain does not have a First Amendment. It does not have a constitution. So their, their press is regulated differently than our press, which pretty much - print media anyway - has always had a traditionally hands-off approach from the government. The First Amendment protects us, and even when we screw up there's really little the government can do unless we libel somebody - you know, do something like that, break a law as we're reporting, those kinds of things. Leveson's report - all 1987 pages of it - noted that journalists regularly ignore the Press Complaints Commission and when it would hand down something, perhaps it's not as strong as it needed to be.

Here, Rowling testifies about how she was made to feel by some Scottish reporters - just in case you think Scotsman are noble and never do anything wrong... She said, "However, as interest in Harry Potter and myself increased, my family and I became the target of a different kind of journalistic activity. The effect on me and our family life truly cannot be overstated." She tells the story about how the first house she was able to buy they they had to move out of it because the press were right there on their doorstep. If any of you have ever been to England, in a lot of the communities the houses are just a sidewalk away from the street, they're built right up on it, so it's not like she had a yard where she can hide out in her house, and there was this great distance that could not be breached by cameras or or whatever. The journalist would just come knocking, and even worse, they would just go knocking on her neighbors' doors, and it caused quite a commotion for the neighbors who had done nothing to deserve any kind of scrutiny.. but there they were.

So this is her telling the story about the Scotsman:

"Two journalists from a Scottish tabloid took up residence outside our house in a car at a time when I was absolutely unaware that there was particular interest in me. I wasn't having a book coming out, I hadn't just given birth - they were just sitting there. So I asked someone who works for the public relations company there, my employee, to please ask them what they wanted, and the response she received was it's a boring day at the office. So my fam, my family and I were literally under surveillance for their amusement. There wasn't even, even a pretense, that there was a story, but it's it's difficult to explain to people who haven't experienced it what that feels like - the twist in the stomach because you wonder what do they want, what do they

think they've got. It's incredibly threatening, it's it feels threatening to have people watching you."

And that twist in the stomach comes about because she says this is because of the behavior of certain journalists and certain publications has made normal family life impossible at times and has had a potentially corrosive effect on even my strongest relationships with family and friends. She tells a story about going on holiday with the family and a photographer with a really long lens was able to get pictures of her about, by that time, I think, eight- or nine-year-old daughter, and how self-conscious the daughter was about being photographed and having the pictures splashed all over the world, well may not the world, but all over the place. Certainly an eight-year-old child should have the right to, you know, vacation on the beach without the world scrutinizing her. OK, so then we get to what she has to say about the Press Complaints Commission, which is something that was echoed pretty much... I'm going to leave it this way so it doesn't mess up ...

"That it offers very little in the way of sanctions to newspapers, that it's a wrist-slapping exercise at best, that we need - and I should say I'm vehemently opposed to state patrol of the media, of course, as I think everyone who's going to sit in this chair is - but I do feel that we need a body that has teeth, that can impose sanctions and I agree with several of the people who have spoken to the inquire before me when they say that prior notification would prevent a significant amount of damage, particularly where defamatory articles are concerned. Apart from that I I can't pretend I have a magical answer - no Harry Potter joke intended. That's different."

So she has no magical answer for what should be done, admitting, of course, that nobody wants to see the press regulated too harshly because we have to have freedom of expression, we have to have the ability to go after politicians, for example, who might be crooked and who need to be held to account, so we don't want to muzzle the press too much, but on the other hand my eight-year-old daughter should be allowed to, you know, crawl up on the beach without having to worry about being photographed.

OK, so a little short word about the wizarding media. In case you haven't noticed it, mainly the news media are represented by three newspapers - I'm imagining them all to be owned by the same company - The Daily Prophet, The Evening Prophet and the Sunday Prophet -- so I don't think that three competitors would name their newspapers that closely to each other. There are numerous magazines mentioned throughout the books, what we think probably would be like a general interest magazine like Good Housekeeping or something like that, Witch Weekly - you know Gilderoy Lockhart is so proud of that - that he's a five-time winner of Witch Weekly's whatever smile award. Which Broomstick, spelled differently which, that Ron consults so ferociously when his mother agrees to buy him a broom when he's named a prefect. Then we have what we might think of as academic journals, Transfiguration Today and The Practical Potioneer, where learned people sit around and discuss the articles that they have read in those magazines. And then, of course, we have the one that's near and dear to my heart, anyway, the Quibbler, which would be probably the equivalent of the National Enquirer for for us here in America and which is certainly a joke at the beginning, with the Spectrespecs, and we read it upside down, and the runes are backwards, and wrackspurts and nargles and all that kind of stuff

- crumpled horn snorkacks - all of those kinds of things certainly play a part in what Xenophilius Lovegood tries to cover, but as we saw in a not too long ago presidential election, even the National Enquirer had a role to play in serious news when it was able to expose a story about a presidential candidate having a love child, so that did pretty much derailed his candidacy and was serious journalism that they did.

So we do see that eventually, of course, as the Prophet becomes more and more under the control of the Ministry of Magic, the Quibbler is the only publication that's telling the truth, letting the world know that Voldemort is back, that we need to fight and Harry's doing this and all of you people pay attention, until of course the Death Eaters kidnap his daughter and then he rapidly changes sides in an attempt to get her back. There's also a wizarding wireless network which would be the equivalent of muggle radios, and we all know the electricity doesn't work around all that magic, so I'm very intrigued to know how the wizarding wireless network works. They do mention a wizarding wireless news program one time - just once - and that is merely in reference to the news stories that it and the Daily Prophet are not reporting - that's farther on when the Death Eaters are taking over and it's becoming harder and harder to find some news. We also hear about a show called Potter Watch, which is kind of like an underground radio that we might think of as the resistance radio back during World War II, and people were making sure that people who weren't trying to fight on the side of good kept hope alive, and and they report the things that the regular news are not able to report any more because they're under the control of Voldemort and his henchmen.

So the readers' view of wizarding media are pretty much confined to those newspapers, and those newspapers are pretty much represented solely by tabloid journalist Rita Skeeter. Tonight we'll examine Rita Skeeter's actions as she reports stories about Harry Potter and his friends focusing mainly on books four and five, Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire and Harry Potter and The Order of the Phoenix. I looked at her reporting methods using the Independent Press Standards Organization's editors code of practice and the IPSO replaced a PC ... PCC just to throw some alphabet soup at you. Quick word about the IPSO - IPSO, like ipso facto - Lord Justice Leveson proposed the new self-regulating body be formed to oversee the press and to make sure that they adhere to the editors code of practice, which would be the equivalent for the journalists in the room of our Society of Professional Journalists code of ethics - it's we have a code of ethics that journalists can voluntarily follow over here and they have a code of practice it's called, which is pretty much the same thing. There's a lot more prescriptive than ours where ours talks about lofty goals, you know, don't do no harm and those kinds of things - they get very down to the nitty-gritty about what they want.

So anyway, Leveson wanted there to be this body with the force of law behind it to regulate the press, but then Prime Minister David Cameron was a little squeamish about having laws to try to control the press. Everybody admits they want the press to stay free and he did not want state interference in the press so the compromise was to seek out and eventually gain a Royal Charter on press regulation. I'm not going to go into too much details on that but it might help you to know that the BBC is overseen by a Royal Charter so the Royal Charter was set up that governs the British Broadcasting Corporation so it sits along the same line. I put this up there just for fun. The first sentence of the Royal Charter is "Elizabeth the second by the grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of our other realms and territories

Queen, head of the Commonwealth, defender of the faith, to all to whom these presents shall come, greetings." It makes me think of Daenerys Targaryen and mother of dragons and breaker of chains and I don't even know what all gets thrown into her title in Game of Thrones all the time. The Royal Charter set up a new regulator, the Independent Press Standards Organization, which is itself overseen by a group called the Press Recognition Panel, the PRP, that you need some more acronyms... The PRP can also approve other regulators and in fact just not too long ago did approve a second one called Impress, which oversees about 40 small publications. In contrast 90% of the UK's newspapers and magazines, more than 1500 print and 1100 online titles, subscribe to the IPSO, they're governed by that.

Now participation is voluntary but there are some incentives to join and to agree to follow the ethical standards that they want you to follow. For example, in a libel suit if you're sued and you are a member of one of these regulatory groups then it limits the damages that can be levied against you if you end up losing, and there's a they're trying to get a law passed now that has not gone through that if you don't belong to one of those even if you win a libel suit you would still have to pay the other side's legal fees, so if somebody sued you for libel even if you prevail and prove that there wasn't a libel, or they don't prove there was a libel, you would still have to pay their legal fees. So there are some really legitimate reasons why you might want to think about joining this group. The editors code of practice is used to adjudicate complaints brought by news sources and the public against newspapers and magazines in the UK but where the old PCC had no power to fine publications that violated its provisions, the new IPSO can. So they they do have the power to punish mainly by levying fines which again for us Americans would be similar to when a television station commits some violation of the Federal Communications Act and the FCC can levy a fine against the TV station for doing that, so it's similar to those things.

The code sets standards for behavior in 16 areas. Skeeter and/or the wizarding news media violate 7 of these principles: accuracy; privacy; harassment; children, which is kind of a weird thing but they have a whole section on how you're supposed to treat children and up to a certain age this is not supposed to happen and then up to a certain age this is not supposed to happen until they get to be adults, which, as a bit of an aside, is probably the reason why the Harry Potter actors were able to grow up pretty much out of the spotlight, because it's off-limits below the age of 17. The paparazzi aren't allowed to follow them around, for example. Rowling's child should be off-limits because under the code of practice they are not supposed to make children targets of news coverage simply because their parents are famous, and in one of the clips I showed you there's a longer version of it and she goes on to talk about that, how children should be protected - they have absolutely no control over who their parents are and over the fact that their parents are famous, so why should they be punished for having a famous author for a mother, for example. OK, so children; hospitals; clandestine devices and subterfuge; and discrimination.

Media ethicist John Merrill says that journalistic writing is quote "writing as self-expression and the journalist puts himself and his very being into his journalism. What he communicates in is in a very real way what he himself is." Seen in this light, Rita Skeeter is what she writes, and what she writes is unethical. She makes things up, she breaks wizarding law to obtain information by underhanded means, she hounds an underage boy to get information when no adults are around to look out for his interests - also, by the way, a violation of the editors code of practice. Let's watch how Skeeter behaves on the job:

"What a charismatic quartet. Hello. I'm Rita Skeeter. I write for the Daily Prophet, but of course, you know that don't you. It's you we don't know. You're the juicy news."

What quirks lurk beneath those rosy cheeks? What mysteries do the muscles mask? Does courage lie beneath those curls? In short, what makes a champion tick? Me, myself and I want to know, not to mention my ravid readers.

So, who's feeling up to sharing? Hmm? Shall we start with the youngest? Lovely."

Harry is who she was really after the whole time.

"This is cozy."

"It's a broom cupboard."

"You should feel right at home, then."

"You don't mind if I use a Quick Quotes Quill, do you?"

"Oh, um, no."

"So tell me, Harry, here you sit, a mere boy of 12..."

"I'm 14."

"...about to compete against three students not only vastly more emotionally mature than yourself, but who have mastered spells you wouldn't attempt in your dizziest daydreams. Concerned?"

"I don't know, I haven't really thought about it."

"Just ignore the quill. Of course, you're no ordinary boy of 12, are you?"

"14."

"Your story's legend. Do you think it was the trauma of your past that made you so keen to enter such a dangerous tournament?"

"Um, no, I didn't enter."

"Of course you didn't. Everyone loves a rebel, Harry. Scratch that last. Speaking of your parents, were they alive, how do you think they'd feel? Proud? Or concerned that your attitude shows at best a pathological need for attention? At worse, a psychotic death wish."

"Hey, my eyes aren't glistening with the ghost of my past."

OK, sorry, that's the only scene they filmed with her in the movies. I was really hoping for some more, but that was all we got. Merrill made clear that journalists must choose to be ethical. Individual choice is an essential component of journalism ethics because, as Merrill said, ethics, unlike law, quote "is personally determined and personally enforced." Skeeter clearly chooses not to be ethical. Now ethical codes may be used as guidelines but ultimately the journalist must choose to follow the guidelines. The journalist may face consequences for unethical behavior, of course, but the real test is what a journalist does when there would actually be no consequences whatsoever if he or she did something wrong. Ethics should be driven by a desire to do what is right rather than by a desire to avoid being punished. It's like when you have a chance to run a red light in the middle of nowhere at two o'clock in the morning, do you go ahead and do it or do you do the legal and ethical thing and stop and wait for the light to change. It's that kind of a question.

Ethics codes can be useful in helping the journalist decide what to do in a given situation, but the final issue comes down to that decision. What does the journalist choose to do or not do? That choice must be rationally made, and journalists should be able to explain their choices when those choices are called in question by their sources, their editors, or their audience. Ethicist Philip Patterson and Lee Wilkins said, "Ethics has come to mean learning to make rational decisions among an array of choices, all of which may be morally justifiable but some more so than others." Rationality is the key word here, for the Greeks believed and modern philosophers affirm that people should be able to explain their ethical decisions to others and that acting ethically could be shown to be the rational decision to make. If ethics is about the decision-making process, is more about the decision-making process than about the final decision, then considering the ethics that guide the journalist's behavior becomes a question of considering what leads a journalist to respond a given way in a given situation.

Patrick Plaisance notes that this is use this usually means choosing from among quote "several options that are unsatisfactory in some way." Rarely do we have, you know, the one golden thing that tells us this is the way we should behave and all these other things are total crap, and we know that they're not the way to go. Ethics comes down to all those situations where this could have this effect and this could have this effect and this is gonna have this effect and maybe none of them are perfect and maybe none of them are incredibly bad, so much so that you would absolutely know that it's the wrong thing to do. So it becomes a question of sorting it out and figuring out what you're going to do. The trick is to figure out which one is most justifiable as you see it and which embodies key values, or as Dumbledore reminds us, *"It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities."* You can be the most skilled journalist, the best writer, have the strongest vocabulary, know AP style frontwards, backwards and inside-out, and if you make the wrong choices, if you are an unethical person, then you are not a good journalist. So, thank you, Dumbledore, for that reminder.

Questions of ethics stem from conflict, either internal or external. In the Harry Potter books the central conflict moves in three phases. First it's Harry versus Voldemort, then it's Harry versus the wizarding world, and then finally it's back to Harry versus Voldemort again because we do foresee the wizarding media and then the wizarding world turn on Harry where they slip little things into stories where they make fun of him or they make him out to seem like he's a crackpot

or he's an attention seeker who's just so thrilled to be famous because of the scar on his head he wants to keep being famous, and they totally portrayed him as the wrong kind of person. He's absolutely not like that. And in hushing up Voldemort's return and making Harry out to be a nut job the news media isolate Harry from the wizarding world and at times even from his friends and his mentors. In the sixth book the news media embraced Harry as the chosen one who will save wizard kind from Voldemort but by then the news media had acquiesced too often in being controlled by the wizarding government. By the seventh book they have been completely taken over by evil wizarding elements. Ethics can be seen as making a choice - sometimes when none of the options are wholly good - to uphold key values of journalism.

Deni Elliott described three of these key values: one is striving to publish news accounts that are balanced, accurate, relevant and complete; she spells that out as BARC. Second, without causing harm that could be prevented and then third, giving citizens information they need for self governance. And this is a common theme as you read about journalism ethics - that we have these three things. We want to present balanced, accurate news coverage. We want to not cause any more harm than we have to and we want to give the citizens what they need for to make informed decisions about who should govern them and how the country, the state, the city - whatever unit of government we're talking about - should run. And of course we run into situations all the time where that could be trouble. OK.

The wizarding media and particularly Skeeter completely and utterly failed to uphold all three of those values and the thing you have to remember is that in book five Rita is really not heard from until Hermione talks to her about covering Harry so that they can, you know, kind of thumb their noses at Delores Umbridge at Hogwarts. But Skeeter only keeps her public in mind when she's deciding what angle will best sell a story. She does not treat anyone fairly and she uses many underhanded tactics which we'll talk about more in just a minute. She certainly does not give her readers the information they need to make informed decisions about their government. Lots of times she's only after the juicy story, and if the juicy story happens to hurt somebody in the process, quite frankly, with Rita I think she thinks so much the better. She truly is a reprehensible person. In Goblet of Fire and Order of the Phoenix, journalism professor Daxton Stewart notes four frames at work. The journalists in these books, he says, seek scandals and the sensational, invade people's privacy, make mistakes and twist the facts, and are not concerned at all about the public interest. Recognize anyone?

Rita Skeeter embodies all of those frames. For Skeeter the end clearly does justify the means but her only end is to write a sensational story. She doesn't care if she tells the truth. She doesn't even really aim to tell the truth. She's always just after the juicy story. With the help of her magical quick quotes quill, which I have, by the way, but I couldn't find tonight before I came, otherwise I would have brought it, brandishing it at all of you as we continue. With the help of her magical quick quotes quill, which writes on its own while she distracts sources with questions, as we just saw in that scene with Harry in the broom cupboard, Skeeter fashions the story she wants to tell, whether the facts back that story or not. The only outcome she considers is the outcome that will serve her story, and yes, by the way, she does report that Harry is 12 years old despite the fact that he has repeatedly corrected her, and she also reports that he entered the contest himself when he has told her truthfully he did not put his name in the Goblet of Fire; he didn't want to do it. So

some specifics and the parts of the editors code that apply. Readers are introduced to Skeeter with the story she writes after Voldemort supporters have disrupted the fan celebrations after the Quidditch World Cup and whoops, what'd I do, sorry - they call me low-tech Lola and there's a reason - so if you'll bear with me I'm gonna read a little section in this book. This is Goblet of Fire, when they've been at the Quidditch World Cup and the Death Eaters start to levitate the muggle family and they, you know, in the movie, of course, they burned down all the tents and then there's Barty Crouch licking his lip weirdly with Harry lying on the floor not too far away. But anyway, in the book, they managed to make it back home and Mrs. Weasley comes running out and you remember right before they left she had yelled at Fred and George for being silly and she was tired of them, and she wanted them to behave themselves, and so when they get back home she's like, "Oh my god, the last thing I said to you was just awful and the sad thing is it could have been the end of what we had," you know she was just so upset. But she's carrying the Daily Prophet in her hand. This is how the movie depicted the Daily Prophet in that situation.

So, "'Come on now, Molly, we're all perfectly okay,' said Mr. Weasley soothingly, prying her off the twins and leading her back toward the house.

'Bill,' he added in an undertone, 'pick up that paper. I want to see what it says.'

When they were all crammed into the tiny kitchen and Hermione had made Mrs. Weasley a cup a very strong tea into which Mr. Weasley insisted on pouring a shot of Ogden's Old Firewhisky, Bill handed his father the newspaper.

Mr. Weasley scanned the front page while Percy looked over his shoulder.

'I knew it,' said Mr. Weasley heavily. 'Ministry blunders, culprits not apprehended, lax security, dark wizards running unchecked, national disgrace. Who wrote this? Ah, of course, Rita Skeeter.'"

Her reputation has preceded herself and, of course, Mr. Weasley as part of the ministry has had many run-ins with Rita Skeeter poking about trying to find the story.

"Percy: 'That woman's got it in for the Ministry of Magic. Last week she was saying we're wasting our time quibbling about cauldron thickness when we should be stamping out vampires, as if it wasn't specifically stated in paragraph 12 in the Guidelines for the Treatment of Non – Wizard Pat-Humans...'

'Do us a favor, Perce,' said Bill, yawning, 'and shut up.'

'I'm mentioned,' said Mr. Weasley his eyes widened behind his glasses as he reached the bottom of the Daily Prophet article.

'Where?' fluttered Mrs. Weasley, choking on her tea and whiskey. 'If I'd seen that I would've known you were alive.'

'Not by name,' said Mr. Weasley. 'Listen to this.'"

And here's an example of the way Rita writes her stories.

"If the terrified wizards and witches who waited breathlessly for news at the edge of the wood expected reassurance from the Ministry of Magic they were sadly disappointed. A ministry official emerged sometime after the appearance of the dark mark" - for those of you who don't know, whenever the Death Eaters would kill somebody they would set off this symbol of Voldemort, which was called the dark mark - it was a skull with a snake coming out of its mouth and it would float in the air above wherever they had killed someone – OK.

"A ministry emerges but refusing to give any information. Whether this statement will be enough to quash the rumors that several bodies were removed from the woods an hour later remains to be seen."

'Oh really,' said Mr. Weasley and in exasperation handed the paper to Percy. 'Nobody was hurt. What was I supposed to say? Rumors that several bodies were removed from the woods? Well, there certainly will be rumors now that she's printed that.'"

So Rita manages to stir things up with the way she writes her story. OK. All these tactics violate the code's first principle, which is focused on accuracy. They're supposed to uphold accuracy and correct inaccuracies by taking care quote "not to publish inaccurate, misleading or distorted information." end quote There is also no indication ever anywhere that she ever corrects anything she has gotten wrong, that people have no recourse when she skewers them in a story. They just have to deal with it, because I never see any evidence, as we would in the Daily Eastern News, of anybody who'd written the error and correcting it. OK. One other part of the accuracy section of the code, "opportunity to reply," is probably also violated, as readers are given no indication that misleading coverage is ever corrected. The editors code states that quote "a fair opportunity to reply to significant inaccuracies should be given when reasonably called for." end quote So again, a source whose name has been misspelled or maybe, you know, you quoted them saying don't when they said do not, that's not the kind of a significant inaccuracy that they're talking about. But when there has been something significant, under the code of practice they're supposed to correct it and even in the most serious situations give the person the right to have some kind of a response, which we know here in America you can't because the Supreme Court has ruled that newspapers cannot be compelled to publish anything any more than they can be stopped from publishing, except in very specific circumstances.

When Skeeter comes to Hogwarts to cover the Triwizard Tournament, what that scene we just saw, she breaks several more principles of the code. The most egregious is in her treatment of Harry as a source and the subject of a story. Harry is 15 at the time and the code has special protections in place for children until they are 16 years old. Among those, they are not to be interviewed or photographed without a custodial parent or a similarly responsible adult's consent, so Rita should have gotten probably Professor McGonagall's permission to interview Harry, and she really should have carried out that interview with an adult present so that Harry would have some protection - somebody to turn to for help answering questions when she asked him about tricky things. But Skeeter drags Harry into the broom cupboard to interview him before any responsible adults are present to stop her, and, in fact, in the movie there's the scene a little bit

later where Dumbledore shows up and takes Harry out of the room. Anyway, Skeeter uses her quick quotes quill to misquote Harry and to make up things he never even said, writing at one point that quote "tears fill those startlingly green eyes as our conversation turns to the parents he can barely remember" end quote. Harry, of course, glancing over, sees that and tries to tell her, 'Hey, I do not have tears in my eyes,' but she goes and writes it anyway.

The article Skeeter writes contains several inaccuracies. She misspells the names of the foreign competitors - Fleur Delacour and Viktor Krum's names - and she leaves poor Cedric Diggory, who is actually the legitimate Hogwarts champion in the Triwizard Tournament, she leaves him out of the article completely and just focuses on Harry and we get this massive story that, of course, in the real world would not happen but takes up most of the front page and like three or four inside pages. It just keeps jumping, so it's like this massive short story level rather than just a newspaper article. She quotes Harry as quote "saying an awful lot of things that he couldn't remember ever saying in his life, let alone in that broom cupboard" end quote.

She continues to hang around Hogwarts looking for a story and she ambushes Harry, following one of the tasks. She shows up at the Care of Magical Creatures class even though by then Dumbledore has forbidden her to come on to the grounds. This is also a violation of a code of practice - you have to have permission to be on the school grounds, and if you don't have permission then you're not supposed to be there. The code says that people are entitled to privacy and notes that quote "students are not to be approached or photographed at school without permission of school authorities." So again, she should have gotten Dumbledore's or McGonagall's or somebody's permission. Now Harry, as a competitor in the tournament and maybe even as a student visiting Hogsmeade, might not have any kind of expectation of privacy, but he does have that expectation of privacy while he's in his class. Then we all know that later on she eavesdrops on the windowsill and catches him out in one of his divination classes and then this Care of Magical Creatures classes that she attends.

The code section on children says young people should be free to complete their time in school without unnecessary intrusion. Yet Skeeter turns up at class without permission and after Dumbledore has forbidden her to enter the school grounds. She also violates the code section on harassment, which states that quote "journalists must not engage in intimidation, harassment or persistent pursuit and must not persist in questioning, telephoning, pursuing or photographing individuals what once asked to desist nor remain on their property when asked to leave and must not follow them." So you are not allowed to closely, you know, harass somebody - either the subject of a story or a source that would be contributing to a story. Later, of course, Skeeter appears to be following the Headmaster's ban. Nobody sees her, but she continues to publish these stories, and Hermione, of course, figures out that Rita is an unregistered animagus. For those of you who have not read the books, that's a human who can turn him or herself into some kind of an animal. So Rita turns herself into a little beetle. She's literally bugging the school when she is flying in and interviewing students who are talking to her in their hand. There's a scene in the book where Draco Malfoy, who seems to be one of her favorite sources, and I would have a conversation with her about that - always going to the same source every single story, but that's another matter entirely.

OK, so she is able to eavesdrop on Hagrid when he is confessing to Madame Maxime that he is half giant, which is a bad thing, the prejudice that means following that. She eavesdrops on Hermione when Viktor Krum is trying to ask her if she'll come visit him the following summer in Bulgaria. And she eavesdrops then again, as I've already mentioned, on Harry when he is in divination class and overcome by the heavy perfume in the room has slips into a sort of a trance where he sees Voldemort and he falls out his chair and awakes with a scream. In so doing she commits the wizarding equivalent of a violation of the code section on the use of clandestine devices and subterfuge. Now we all know, again, that electronic recording devices would not work at Hogwarts because there's too much magic, but she certainly is resorting to subterfuge to get to sources to gather material for her stories. This, of course, proves to be her undoing when she is caught by Hermione when Harry is in the hospital wing after the last tournament task. Hermione imprisons Rita in a jar and makes her promise not to write anything for a year or else Hermione will turn her in for being an unregistered animagus. Rita holds to that agreement.

All of this odd eavesdropping, of course, leads to stories that cause trouble for Harry and his friends. In the story on Hagrid, for example, she violates the code by casting aspersions on Hagrid's character simply because he's a half giant. The code prohibits reporters from discriminating against people by making quote "prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual's race" end quote. And in the Harry Potter books giants are a different race of beings. Hagrid's father was human and his mother was a giantess. One final note: the top of the code contains what many critics consider to be a major loophole in that it permits violations of the code if the reporting is done in the public interest. Now this is intended to be if a journalist is pursuing some sort of story about wrongdoing on the part probably of an elected government official or maybe a government program where the it's not doing what it's supposed to do. But Skeeter, of course, is not interested in those kinds of stories. She's really only interested in stories that interest the public rather than stories that are in the public's interest. Rowling's book shows quite clearly what happens when a reporter conflates that very thing - stories that the public is interested in rather than stories that are in the public interest.

When Rita is when Hermione finally lets Rita out of the jar halfway through that terrible year when Dolores Umbridge has taken over Hogwarts and allows her to interview Harry, Rita is at first delighted. "Me, myself and I want to know!"

"Unemployment did not suit Rita. The hair that had once been set in elaborate curls now hung lank and unkempt around her face. The scarlet paint on her 2-inch talons was chipped, and there were a couple of faux jewels missing from her winged glasses. She took another gulp of her drink and said out of the corner of her mouth, 'Pretty girl, is she Harry?'"

'One more word about Harry's love life and the deal's off, and that's a promise,' said Hermione irritably. "'

And then a little while later Hermione has said something along the lines of, "Oh, I bet you'd like to have the names of all those Death Eaters," and Rita says,

"'I'd love them,' breathed Rita, now fumbling in her bag once more and gazing at him as though he was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen. A great bold headline, 'Potter accuses'; a

subheading, 'Harry Potter names Death Eaters still among us' and then beneath the nice big photograph of you, 'disturbed teenage survivor, You Know Who's attacker Harry Potter, 15, caused outrage yesterday by accusing respectable and prominent members of the wizarding community of being Death Eaters.'

The quick quotes quill was actually in her hand and halfway to her mouth when the rapturous expression died out of her face. 'But of course,' she said, lowering the quill, looking daggers at Hermione, 'Little Miss Perfect wouldn't want that story out there, would she?'

'As a matter of fact,' said Hermione sweetly, 'that's exactly what Little Miss Perfect does want.'

Rita then gives Hermione a lesson in newsroom economics. So the Daily Prophet or the Daily Profit? And again, bear with me, please, because I find this to be one of the most telling and truthful passages in the book, and journalists will get it but a lot of other people probably just read right past it and don't think much of it at all.

"You want me to report what he says about He Who Must Not be Named?" Rita asked Hermione in a hushed voice.

'Yes, I do,' said Hermione. 'The true story - all the facts exactly as Harry reports them. He'll give you all the details. He'll tell you the names of the undiscovered Death Eaters he saw there. He'll tell you what Voldemort looks like now. Oh, get a grip on yourself,' she added contemptuously, throwing a napkin across the table, for at the sound of Voldemort's name Rita had jumped so badly that she slopped half her glass of fire whiskey down herself.

Rita blotted the front of her grubby raincoat, still staring at Hermione, then she said baldly, 'The Prophet wouldn't print it. In case you haven't noticed, nobody believes his cock-and-bull story. Everyone thinks he's delusional. Now, if you let me write the story from that angle...'

And Hermione cuts her off, 'We don't need another story about how Harry's lost his marbles,' said Hermione angrily. 'We've had plenty of those already, thank you. I want him given the opportunity to tell the truth.'

'There's no market for a story like that,' said Rita coldly.

'You mean The Prophet won't print it because Fudge won't let them?' said Hermione irritably.

Rita gave Hermione a long, hard look, then leaning forward across the table to order she said in a businesslike tone. 'All right. Fudge is leaning on The Prophet, but it comes to the same thing. They won't print a story that shows Harry in a good light. Nobody wants to read it. It's against the public mood. This last Azkaban breakout has got people quite worried enough. People just don't want to believe You Know Who's back.'

'So The Daily Prophet exists to tell people what they want to hear, does it?' said Hermione scathingly.

Rita sat up straight again, her eyebrows raised and drained her glass of fire whiskey. 'The Prophet exists to sell itself, you silly girl,' she said coldly."

So, we know that we have to sell newspapers in order to stay in business. We have to have financial support. But there's supposed to be a kind of a balancing act where we do what we have to do to stay in business but we also report in the public's interest, and as Rita scathingly says, there's no market for that. Nobody wants to hear the bad news that Voldemort is back. They only want to hear that Harry has lost his marbles. And Skeeter's only interest is in giving the public what it's interested in hearing rather than what it needs to know. Journalists always strive for that balance between what you need to know to get by in the world, to make informed decisions at the polling place, pay your property taxes on time, and know that you can't park on the street because a parade's coming and all those kinds of things. But we also try to give people stories that will entertain them, amuse them, uplift them, you know, tug their heart strings - all that kind of stuff.

Rita is only interested in the other kind of story, not the stories that people need to know. She's only interested in the stories that people want to know. OK. Because of that and because of its unwillingness to knuckle under to the ministry - I'm sorry, its willingness to knuckle under to the Ministry of Magic, The Daily Prophet does not fill the newspaper's traditional role of serving as a public sphere where information relating to the governing of people's lives can be shared and debated by an informed society. That's the ideal, right, where we have that marketplace of ideas where people would be able to talk about things and the good ideas would win over the bad. Instead that role falls to - ta da - The Quibbler. In the wizarding world, where the newspaper knuckles under the Ministry of Magic, those who want real news must turn to an alternative publication. But, as I said, up unto a certain point Xenophilius Lovegood does a better job of reporting on Voldemort than the Daily Prophet does.

We see throughout the novels, especially Goblet of Fire and Order of the Phoenix, that the public interest is not served by a press that seeks only to serve up what interests the public. Notice any parallels with mainstream media in the muggle world these days? When we all talk about infotainment and how much space is devoted to the news about the Kardashians and celebrity things and not enough news, not enough space is allotted to investigative kinds of stories and stories that report that necessary but also somewhat mundane details of the City Council meetings and the county board meetings and those kinds of things. To close tonight I'd like to leave the journalists in the room with some words of wisdom from Albus Dumbledore. No, not nitwit, blubber, oddment and tweak – this:

"Dark and difficult times lie ahead. Soon we must all face the choice between what is right and what is easy."

And as we have daily proof in the daily news journalists today are indeed facing dark and difficult times, squeezed by economic pressures and newsroom cutbacks, accused of writing fake news at every turn, manipulated by politicians and flacks, journalists must take Dumbledore's admonition to heart and also always remember what he said earlier, "It is our choices that make us what we are." Thank you.

Knight-Davis: We have a certificate here for you.

Speaker: Sure, if anybody has any questions, if I haven't, like Professor Binns, droned on too long.

Audience: Lola, did you say that the newspapers were presented in the books, or was it just the movies.

Speaker: No, they're presented in the books. There's way more about them in the books- oh no

Audience: No, I mean, what they look like.

Speaker: Oh, no no no, the only thing we know in the books is that the pictures move. Wizards have some magic potion that if you develop the pictures in that, then the pictures will move.

Audience: But what you showed us was from the movies?

Speaker: Yes, they're the mockups. And, of course, in the movies they wouldn't the pictures did move, but not in the still photos.

I did find one gif that was when Sirius Black is screaming but I couldn't figure out a way to work that in since I didn't do anything with Prisoner of Azkaban in this. That would've cool.

All right. Thank you very much!